

THE WELL FAMILY - WHAT ARE THE FEATURES?

It is necessary to have an idea as to the features of a healthy or well family. This will enable the members to work towards clear objectives that will influence positive changes. Well families create the conditions for well individuals.

THE HEALTH OF A FAMILY IS BASED ON RESPECT: TO SELF, EACH OTHER, GOD AND THE WORLD

Get your family together to identify features outlined by the acronym RESPECT.

Identify:

- issues of concern;
- what practices, information and suggestions other *parts of this book* can be of help;
- what *other books, videos, etc.*, can help;
- what *educational resources or support groups or speakers* could help;
- using professional help, if necessary.

Thus in the attitude of respect members work together on:

- **REGULATING** the organization:
 - roles;
 - behavioural rules;
 - the use of power;
 - the formation of coalitions (e.g. parental or sibling coalitions);
 - management of adequacy and flexibility of personal and family boundaries and space;
 - flexibility; and
 - autonomy.
- **ENGAGING** with:
 - the *life cycle stages and tasks of the family* as a whole; as well as
 - *stages of development and related nutritional needs and autonomy of the individuals* within them.
- **SERVING**:
 - God;
 - each other; and
 - the society through the promotion of *values and responsibility*.
- **PROBLEM SOLVING** through the *well developed skills and well defined proceedings* that are:
 - encouraged;
 - learnt;
 - used.
- **EMOTIONAL SHARING** through:
 - affection;

- intimacy;
 - empathy;
 - effective conflict management where everyone wins; and
 - anger management where there is ventilation, apologies, forgiveness and restitution.
- *COMMUNICATING AND ACTIVITY SHARING* through the routines of:
 - talking;
 - working;
 - eating;
 - playing;
 - celebrating; and
 - praying together.
 - *TRANSPARENCY* versus the use of individual and group defences.

INDIVIDUAL DEFENCES include:

- ❖ denial – This is easy! I just never did it so I am not responsible. Some denials lead to genuine unconscious selective forgetting;
- ❖ projection of putting blame on to others – A common way to avoid looking on one’s weakness;
- ❖ manipulation to get one’s way and relieve the anxiety of frustration;
- ❖ suppressing feelings rather than admitting to them;
- ❖ displacing anger on to others.

FAMILY GROUP DEFENCES include:

- ❖ projective identification – setting up someone to act out *my own* weaknesses, they accept this role and then both persons begin to relate accordingly. I project and coerce another to admit my denied weakness, they accept and identify with it, I accuse and ? about my denied faults. They feel guilty and upset.
- ❖ family coalitions or cliques – such as mother and daughter against father. The parental coalition is the base of the family;
- ❖ triangulation - (two persons using a third to solve their relationship problems). Thus a young adult male rebelling against ? and lack of freedom, being held on to by his mother for fear of losing her husband. As long as her son is giving trouble she will have things to discuss;
- ❖ scapegoating - using a vulnerable or difficult member to distract from the weakness of others;
- ❖ enmeshment – sticking together like glue for fear of outside world and co-dependency. Emancipation of children is discouraged. So is freedom of partners;
- ❖ blackmailing – of others by irrational guilt or threats of non-support or dying and suicide.
- ❖ family myths and secrets – myths: “The Cambell boys always marry farmer women. “Men: this family is no good”. Secrets: “Never tell ? father is really her father’s best friend”. Some myths and secrets serve to protect power and prevent the discomfort of progressive change to the present status quo

Defences are methods that both individuals and the family use to bring about a sense of “false peace”. False in that the problem, though tucked away in a corner, is not solved. It keeps building up in the corner waiting to explode later in divorce, illness, or an offspring having serious problems. “This could never happen!” “What a fine family!” others may say. This family **was not transparent**. We saw the games that covered up the problems very well. The family or someone in it will explode soon.

In contrast, the family next door may be struggling with violence, teenage pregnancy and boys on drugs, **but problems are no secret**, and they are into several family and other self-help programs.